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ABSTRACT

This guide shows why organizations need an assessment strategy to raise the quality and flexibility of the assessment they provide for learners. It contains guidelines to assist organizations in designing a strategy for offering a range of services for their own particular context. Section 1 discusses why organizations need an assessment policy. Section 2 addresses the purposes of assessment and the rationale for formative and summative assessments. Section 3 covers how assessment is done. It discusses types of assessment and provides tables that describe some common beliefs about assessment, describe the effects of these beliefs, and suggest how an assessment strategy can help organizations to challenge them. Section 4 describes different assessment services needed at appropriate stages in all learning programs. Each description is followed by examples of strategies to help implement or improve it. A figure summarizes all the services that can be offered. Section 5 provides guidelines for designing an assessment policy and a strategy for implementing it. Checklists to review different assessment services are presented. Section 6 discusses developing an organizational strategy for assessment services. Section 7 outlines some approaches that have been adopted by different agencies to widen access to assessment and accreditation. It summarizes their key features and discusses barriers that prevent them from being successfully implemented. Section 8 is a summary. (YLB)

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Understanding Assessment

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Understanding Assessment

A Guide for Teachers and Managers in Post-Compulsory Education

Kathryn Ecclestone

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Preface

Long-term demographic and structural changes in the job market are leading to pressures on the education and training system to attract and retain new groups of learners. A series of initiatives aims to raise levels of achievement through formal qualifications, particularly for adult learners. These targets can only be reached if reliable and accessible forms of assessment enable adults to have their achievements recognised and accredited, and motivate learners to progress easily between different programmes and agencies. Assessment and accreditation are being offered in new contexts and by a wide range of people who are required to be assessors. More learners are being assessed – work-based learning increasingly leads to credits for higher education awards or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), many adult education programmes now offer accreditation, and growing numbers of adults are entering 'formal' education. There is therefore widespread concern to rationalise both the forms of assessment and accreditation offered to learners, and the assessment of 'standards' within them. Moreover, as well as helping to raise levels of achievement, assessment plays a vital role in supporting and enhancing learning. It can inform learners about their abilities and progress, and motivate them to want to continue learning.

Yet, in spite of its importance, assessment is proving to be a complex issue for many education providers. How it is organised and offered depends often on *ad hoc* and pragmatic responses to particular initiatives as they arise, as well as custom and practice in different forms of accreditation. This can make it difficult to recognise that the overall purposes of assessment are the same in all contexts of learning. It also prevents many providers from adopting a strategic approach to planning and organising assessment efficiently and cost-effectively. New funding arrangements make such an approach all the more necessary.

This guide is based on extensive consultation with a wide range of providers in adult learning carried out for the Unit for Development of Adult and Continuing Education (UDACE) and the Further Education Unit (FEU) between 1991 and 1993. A number of observations arise from the consultation:

- there is a wealth of expertise in different programmes and agencies which can be used to inform good practice
- confusion about the purposes of assessment prevents good practice from being shared
- organisations have to offer learners a number of different services to assess and accredit achievement without duplication of effort and with limited resources
- staff require support in developing a wide range of skills in recognising, assessing and accrediting a range of learning outcomes
- an assessment policy, and a strategy to achieve it, can enable agencies to provide a range of assessment services for learners.

A framework to clarify the purposes of assessment at different stages can provide a basis for organisations to design a policy and implement an

organisational assessment strategy. Guidelines for doing this are given in this publication.

This report therefore:

- shows that an assessment policy, combined with a strategy to implement it, will improve the quality and accessibility of assessment across a range of programmes and agencies
- provides a framework for examining why assessment is used and how assessment services are offered to learners
- gives examples of good practice and guidelines for designing and implementing an assessment policy
- provides a framework for developing the skills and confidence of teachers and learners in using a range of approaches to assessment.

It can also be used to:

- raise the level of debate within an institution or agency about the best ways of providing assessment
- identify particular barriers which prevent learners from gaining access to a range of assessment in different types of programmes
- challenge conflicting views about assessment amongst learners, teachers, employers and guidance workers.

Audience

As its title suggests, this publication is intended for:

- staff with management and development responsibilities for:
  - assessment and accreditation
  - staff development and training
  - guidance and careers advice

in further and higher education, adult and community education and Open College Networks.

It may also be of interest to:

- TEC managers and staff involved in assessment initiatives
- work-place trainers/assessors
- teacher educators and trainers.

Section 1

Why Organisations Need an Assessment Policy

In formulating a policy for assessment, an organisation will have three main objectives:

- to raise levels of achievement
- to measure this achievement reliably
- to organise assessment cost-effectively.

Achieving these objectives will enable an institution to address a number of issues.

Motivating people to undertake life-long learning

Assessment helps people describe their past achievements, recognise new ones and make informed choices about how they can continue their learning; it can therefore give them the skills and motivation to continue seeking assessment in other settings. However, simply increasing access to existing forms of assessment and accreditation will not automatically give learners this motivation.

Overcoming learners' anxieties about assessment

Many learners associate assessment with negative experiences of competition, selection and failure. In spite of this, many adults returning to formal learning want meaningful and detailed feedback about their progress. Clarity about the purposes of assessment enables it to be seen as an integral part of learning.

Increasing understanding about the purposes of assessment

Initial guidance, diagnosing needs and progression routes, making entry decisions, reviewing progress and providing proof of achievement are all vital purposes of assessment. Agencies will need to organise different services to meet these purposes so that individualised programmes can be designed.

Valuing all the important outcomes of learning

Formal accreditation tends to restrict assessment to the outcomes required for a particular qualification. A wide range of learning outcomes can be made explicit by sharing good practice from a variety of different programmes.

Developing indicators of quality that cover a range of learning outcomes

Pressures to increase qualification levels and reduce costs can lead to crude, quantitative measures of quality. These tend to emphasise a narrow 'output' model of achievement such as completion rates or progression. Different bodies – funding councils, employers, higher education and training organisations, and learners – all value different measures of quality and different outcomes; these can be considered through an assessment strategy.

Resourcing flexible forms of assessment

Modular, individualised programmes and credit accumulation and transfer require an infrastructure of different assessment services to support them. These services – pre-entry guidance, diagnostic assessment, action planning, review and recording of achievement – are part of the infrastructure an agency needs if it is to avoid duplication of effort and resources.

Developing the competence and confidence of staff in assessment

Many teachers and other assessors have received limited training in assessment skills. This can limit the types of assessment offered to learners and prevent good practice being shared between agencies and programmes.

Section 2

Purposes of Assessment

Why we assess

For many teachers, learners and other interested parties – employers, funders, admissions tutors – assessment is still largely associated with testing to provide proof of achievement, to form a basis for selection and, recently, to compare 'outputs' between institutions. This emphasis has tended to downplay other reasons for assessing learners, such as diagnosing needs and learning targets, and recognising prior achievement.

The assessment framework used here is designed to explore a number of aspects in assessment:

- different purposes at different stages of a learning programme
- assessment methods used to suit the different purposes
- the range of staff skills needed
- beliefs about assessment.

The framework is based on various questions that learners, teachers, education managers, funders and employers have about learning and progression. Assessment can provide answers to these (see Figure 1). An

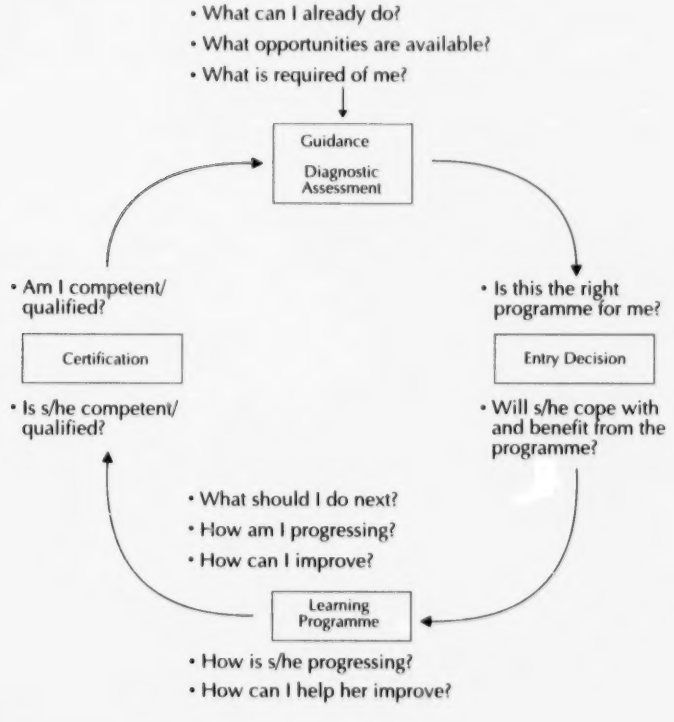
• What can I already do?
• What opportunities are available?
• What is required of me?
Guidance
Diagnostic Assessment
• Is this the right programme for me?
Entry Decision
• Will s/he cope with and benefit from the programme?
Learning Programme
• How is s/he progressing?
• How can I help her improve?
• What should I do next?
• How am I progressing?
• How can I improve?
Certification
• Is s/he competent/ qualified?
• Am I competent/ qualified?

Figure 1 Questions Assessment Can Answer

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institution or agency (or a consortium of agencies) has to ensure that assessment is organised to help answer these questions.

Assessment is carried out for three main reasons:

Selection
Employers, managers of learning programmes and admissions tutors use assessment to differentiate between learners in order to select for employment, admit people to appropriate learning programmes or provide a licence to practise. 'Scientific' methods of testing, and measurement for selection and grading, are still strong features of assessment and accreditation at the stages of entry to learning programmes and for formal certification of achievement.

Diagnosing learning needs
Learners and their teachers need to be able to recognise previous learning achievements and build on the wealth of experience people bring to learning. This leads to better negotiation about learning needs as the starting point for creating programmes to meet individual learners' particular aspirations. Guidance, tutorials and review of progress play vital roles in supporting learning and building confidence. They are important aspects of many learning programmes, particularly in adult and community-based education and Access or 'return to study' programmes.

Certificating achievement
Learners, teachers, admissions tutors and employers require evidence of skills, competence and other achievements so that learners can progress into appropriate learning programmes and employment. Clearly defined criteria for assessment and wider access to assessment and accreditation, in the work-place through NVQs and in community-based programmes, enable more learners to have their achievements formally recognised. Proof of achievement enables many adult learners to move from informal programmes outside education and training institutions to more formal qualification routes.

Assessment is carried out on behalf of learners, teachers, admissions tutors, employers and the Funding Councils. The outcomes of assessment therefore provide answers to some key questions for a number of interested parties. Organisations can increase the effectiveness of assessment if:

- they are clear about the purposes of assessment and know how it is provided in different programmes
- staff are helped to develop the skills they need for various assessment roles.

Learners are more empowered to play an active role in assessment and to negotiate their progression through the education and training system if:

- the purpose of different forms of assessment and the methods being used are explained to them
- staff are clear about their own role in assessment and make this clear to the learner
- assessors have a range of appropriate skills, knowledge and personal qualities.

Formative assessment

The outcomes of assessment enable learners and their teachers to answer some key questions:

? *What can I/s/he do*
? *What opportunities are open to me/him/her*
? *Which programmes/opportunities can I/s/he benefit from*
? *What do I/s/he need to do next*
? *How well am I/s/he progressing*
? *What is the best route to my/his/her goal*

It can therefore be used to:

- provide guidance about opportunities, choices and possibilities
- diagnose a learner's needs
- recognise and assess what someone has already achieved
- negotiate an action plan or learning agreement
- review progress by providing constructive feedback about skills, knowledge and understanding
- set further learning targets so that teachers can identify needs and plan further opportunities for learners to practise and apply skills
- help learners to reflect on their own ways of learning.

Examples might be:

- a skills test used to provide feedback to a learner about her current level of competence and to help her decide on the best programme to develop further skills
- elements of competence in a National Vocational Qualification reviewed and recorded so that new targets can be set
- an in-course portfolio built up over the period of an HE degree as a reflective tool which helps learners to record their progress in gaining 'enterprise' skills and to assist in the assessment of their peers
- a Record of Achievement based on a range of 'core skills' for adults on an Access to Higher Education programme used as the focus for review and discussion with tutors to link progress in different subjects.

This is formative assessment, which is intended to improve learners' final performance and achievement. It helps learners and teachers recognise what opportunities should be provided through a learning programme and other experiences. It emphasises experimentation, action and change. Although it also provides information for teachers and managers of learning programmes, it is primarily used for learners.

The results of formative assessment can remain private between guidance workers, teachers and learners, and do not have to be made public. However, many programmes and requirements for accreditation do not specify that formative assessment should be provided, although teachers often carry out guidance, diagnosis and review without calling it formative assessment. Without formative assessment at different stages, individualised learning programmes and action plans are difficult to offer.

Summative assessment

The outcomes of assessment are also used to answer a number of external questions, such as:

? *Can this person benefit from this programme*
? *Is s/he qualified/competent*

It is therefore used to:

- make decisions about entry to appropriate programmes
- give exemption from traditional entry requirements

- make final judgements about a learner's potential at the next level of education, training or employment
- provide formal evidence that learners are competent in an occupational role/able to undertake further study or training
- accredit prior learning for all or part of a qualification
- certificate achievement at the end of a learning programme or module and issue a qualification, award and/or record of achievement.

This is summative assessment, which demonstrates that learners have achieved particular objectives or met certain criteria. It provides information which is publicly available to providers of education and training at higher levels, as well as managers and teachers within the organisation, learners, funders and employers. It therefore has to:

- provide clear, objective, external criteria to ensure that appropriate evidence is used by assessors, that this measures what it is intended to and is therefore valid
- standardise and moderate the allocation of grades to ensure that different assessments and assessors produce consistent results and are therefore reliable.

Examples might be:

- a portfolio of evidence of prior achievement and current competence submitted for accreditation towards part or all of an NVQ
- a selection interview and test, based on clear criteria for recruitment to make decisions about entry to a programme
- an in-course portfolio compiled to provide the basis both for the award of a grade and a statement of achievement written by the tutor or work-placement supervisor
- a summative grade aggregated from grades gained during the programme.

Although summative assessment provides information for learners to make decisions about progression, it is primarily used for teachers, admissions tutors and employers. If it is proceeded by formative assessment, summative assessment is more effective and efficient.

The difference between formative and summative assessment therefore arises from the overall reason for using it. This distinction affects its timing, frequency and who carries it out. However, the requirements of examining and awarding bodies, the design of programmes, and custom and practice still largely determine the use of summative and formative assessment. As a result, the balance between them varies considerably from teacher to teacher and programme to programme.

What assessment is

Assessment is the judgement of evidence submitted for a specific purpose; it is therefore an act of measurement. It requires two things: evidence and a standard or scale. Evidence may take many forms, from casual observation to extended technical tests or written examination papers. Standards or scales also take many forms but all involve measuring the individual against one of three things:

- an absolute criterion ('can this person add 2 + 2 to make 4?')
- a cohort or group ('can this person do this better than the average of the group/this year's candidates/all mathematicians?')

- the learner's own previous performance ('can this person do this better than they could last week/month?').

It consists of three overall processes:

- deciding how the outcomes of the assessment will be used
- gathering appropriate and relevant evidence
- making judgements about the validity of evidence.

Assessment can lead to certification of achievement towards a whole qualification (or part of one) and it can be part of a process of identifying achievements and further targets for learning.

It can be carried out by:

- learners, a guidance worker or an assessor (teacher, work-based supervisor or trainer)
- a combination of people and agencies working together.

Sometimes it is based on a joint agreement between learner and assessor of what judgement should be made, whilst at other times the judgement is the sole responsibility of the assessor.

Section 3

How We Assess

Types of assessment

Formative and summative assessment use some form of criteria or standards for measurement. These may be explicitly or implicitly based on:

- general notions of how an excellent/average/poor learner performs (norm-referencing)
- direct comparisons with other learners in the same group or cohort (norm-referencing)
- an absolute, externally defined measure or standard (criterion-referencing)
- a learner's own previous performance (self-referencing or 'ipsative assessment').

Norm-referencing is a process applied to the end result of assessment to standardise and rank performance in relation to the highest and lowest level of attainment shown by other candidates. It may also compare performance with that of previous cohorts. The achievement of each individual is measured by comparing him/her to:

- the learner's particular class or group
- a wider group of candidates, such as the total annual cohort taking a particular subject.

Norm-referencing is designed to:

- enable selection when there is competition for limited places at higher levels of education, employment or training
- enable examiners to rank learners in a particular cohort in order of preference.

Norm-referencing is more likely to be used when:

- demand for access exceeds places available
- criteria for excellent or exceptional candidates remain implicit
- agencies or institutions wish to select quickly from the 'best' candidates available.

Norm-referencing may be based on pre-determined criteria but these often rely on implicit notions of good/excellent/poor performance. They are not usually made explicit to learners and may not be very specific or consistent between examiners. Sometimes assessors are unaware of the implicit criteria that inform their judgements. The actual 'level' or 'standard' of achievement gained for the top and failure mark can also vary with each cohort. Information about rank order is more important to its users than details of individual achievements or how these were gained.

Criterion-referencing compares an individual's performance with specific, external and explicit criteria rather than with other learners' performance.

Criterion-referencing is designed to:

- provide specific information about what individuals actually can do

- make requirements for assessment, differentiated grades and/or levels of 'mastery' or 'excellence' clearer to learners and assessors
- enable assessors to differentiate on a simple pass/not yet passed basis
- recognise a wide range of diversity among individuals rather than ranking them against the performance of others.

Criterion-referenced assessment is more likely to be used when:

- there is a desire to remove barriers in access to education, training and employment by being explicit about what entry requirements are
- access or licence to practice requires a clearer and more detailed description of competence than is provided through descriptions of rank order.

Ipsative (self-referenced) assessment is a form of criterion-referencing which measures a person's performance against her/his own previous performance and self-defined criteria. It can be used alongside other approaches since these criteria allow an individual learner to reach her/his own standard of achievement. In some programmes, however, it is sufficient on its own and other externally-defined criteria need not be used. The process can build up confidence and the skills of self-assessment before learners move on to measurement against externally defined standards.

Ipsative assessment is more likely to be used when:

- learners want to chart their own progress and set their own targets
- assessment against an external standard is not appropriate or required
- learners want or need to develop the ability to assess their own work independently of the tutor.

Many qualifications and learning programmes use a combination of ipsative, criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessment but the reasons for using these forms of assessment are not often made clear. Learners are often uncertain about what criteria are being used or how they relate to assessment methods or grading and marking systems. This can prevent learners from making the best use of their skills and previous experience. Many accreditation systems are based on criterion-referenced assessment and disassociate themselves from norm-referencing. However, underlying notions such as 'advanced', 'basic' and 'average' may involve an implicit use of norms.

An organisational strategy for assessment enables teachers and assessors to share their expertise by being much more specific about different levels of performance (and making the criteria which underpin these explicit to learners). This enables learners to recognise what has been achieved and to set targets for improving performance. It also provides better descriptions of achievement and rank order to employers and admissions tutors.

Analysing the learning outcomes that underpin different levels of achievement reduces the tendency to use criteria that implicitly compare learners with each other and provides more information on their individual strengths and weaknesses.

The effectiveness of assessment is therefore increased if organisations use an assessment strategy to examine:

- implicit criteria which might be used by assessors, admissions tutors and employers
- reasons for using particular forms of assessment at different stages of learning programmes

- how assessment methods relate to learning outcomes and how evidence of these outcomes will be provided for a range of interested parties
- how results will be recorded and interpreted by different users
- whether norm- and criterion-referenced and ipsative assessment are being used appropriately in learning programmes.

Figure 2 represents the different 'stages' and purposes of assessment and the different types which might be used. Each stage produces particular outcomes and information. The next section explores the effects of these outcomes on our beliefs about assessment.

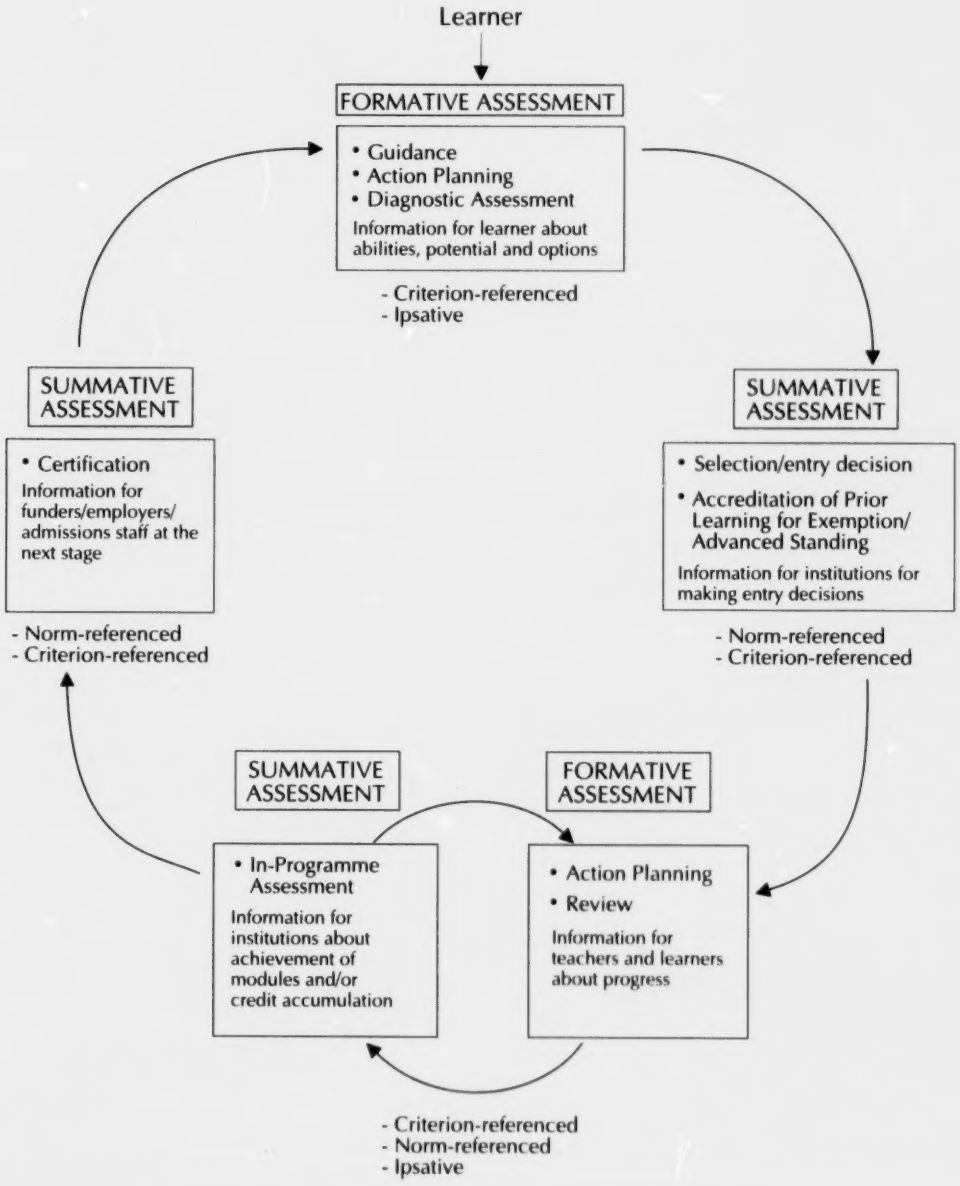

Figure 2 Why Assessment is Used

Beliefs about assessment

The outcomes of assessment provide information about learners for a number of interested parties. Failure to recognise the purposes of assessment can cause confusion and lead to conflicting views about why assessment is important, how and when it should be done and who should be involved. These views are reinforced by teachers' and learners' own experiences of assessment, awarding bodies' requirements, and custom and practice in the delivery of learning programmes.

Beliefs about assessment can become barriers to disseminating good practice, to developing assessors' skills and to recognising and recording a broad range of achievements. An organisational strategy for raising the quality of assessment can enable agencies and institutions to examine some of the beliefs which may affect how assessment is resourced and provided in different learning programmes.

The tables which follow describe some common beliefs, the effects of these beliefs and suggest how an assessment strategy can help organisations to challenge them.

Useful reading

Assessing Students: How shall we know them? (1987) Derek Rowntree, Kogan Page.

An A-Z of Assessment Myths and Assessment in the Workplace (1991) Russell Docking, Competence and Assessment Briefing Series No. 4, Employment Department.

Assessment in Higher Education (1993) J. Atkins *et al.*, Employment Department.

BELIEF	EFFECTS	HOW A STRATEGY CAN HELP
Grading is an accurate reflection of ability and a vital part of assessment. Grading is a contentious and complicated issue in education and training. It arises from a need to differentiate cost- effectively between learners in order to ration (and select for) limited opportunities in employment, HE and entry to the professions.	• Grading becomes a convenient short-hand for 'describing' performance and often masks the need to show achievement of a range of outcomes. • Learners can become motivated to attain grades as ends in themselves and overlook achievement of other learning outcomes • Where criteria for devising grades are made explicit, they may still rely implicitly on comparison with other learners. Terms such as 'thorough' , 'limited', 'reasonably accurate', are often based on unchallenged expectations of how 'good', 'excellent' and 'poor' learners in a particular group will perform. • As predictions of performance, grades can be vague or misleading and conceal undisciplined or subjective judgements. • When used for selection, grading often prevents all learners achieving a first class grade, however well they do.	Teachers and organisations need to: • describe more of the learning outcomes implicit in being described as an 'excellent' graduate/chef/Access student (for example) • share the criteria used with learners • recognise and acknowledge the potentially subjective nature of grading • make the purpose, intended outcomes and criteria for achievement as clear as possible • review how and why grading is used in particular programmes • base differentiation between learners on criteria such as the range of outcomes covered, the level of complexity in the task, the autonomy shown by learners or time taken to achieve outcomes.

Table 1

BELIEF	EFFECTS	HOW A STRATEGY CAN HELP
Testing for 'excellence' is more important than describing 'competence'. For many people the maintenance of 'academic standards' and access to high status occupations depends on rationing achievement of 'excellence' to only a small proportion of the population.	• Assessment for selection, based on comparing learners with each other, has confused notions of 'excellence' with grading, norm-referencing and rank order. • Testing and assessment have traditionally discriminated between candidates in order to provide reliability and consistency of results, rather than describing the evidence which underpins different levels of achievement. Ranking the performance of learners has limited descriptions and evidence of both 'competence' and 'excellence'.	Teachers and organisations need to: • base differentiation of learners, and proof of excellence, on criteria which are as clear and unambiguous as possible in order to provide better descriptions of both 'excellence' and 'competence' • share professional expertise and implicit notions of 'excellence' to enable more of the hidden criteria which underlie these notions to be made explicit • recognise when implicit norm-referencing is taking place.
Assessment is always a competitive process. Using assessment to compare, select and grade learners means that it is still seen by many as inevitably competitive and therefore limited in scope.	• Formative assessment is down-played in favour of competition for 'good grades' and this can close off dialogue between teachers and learners about how to improve performance. • Learners often see themselves as passive recipients of judgements made by teachers and other assessors. • Criteria for comparison and selection are not usually made explicit to learners.	Teachers and learners need to: • review progress during a learning programme and involve learners more actively in the assessment process by describing their achievements.

Table 2

BELIEF	EFFECTS	HOW A STRATEGY CAN HELP
Adults dislike and fear assessment. Many adults initially enter informal community-based education or formal institutional programmes having had negative experiences of assessment in the past. There is still a strong view amongst some teachers that adults dislike and fear assessment, and that it must therefore be 'softened' or disguised in some way.	• Informal assessment often takes place. This can be confusing and reinforce the uncertainties of adults. • Assessment to make a decision about entry to a learning programme may be based on implicit criteria which are not explained to learners. • Learners may not have access to the accreditation and diagnostic assessment they need for progression and formal recognition of achievement. • Adults progressing to new systems of assessment and accreditation, such as HE, are often unprepared for more formal approaches to assessment.	Teachers and organisations need to: • be clear about the purpose of assessments • share criteria for entry decisions and certification • explain different roles played by staff • recognise that many adults want and seek feedback about their progress and achievement • enable adult learners to recognise what assessment is for, how it can help them and what their own role in it is.
Assessment is a retrospective, end process. The design and organisation of many learning programmes and continued use of terminal examinations or tests places summative assessment at the end of a linear teaching process.	• Assessment to provide meaningful feedback to learners and make learning more effective in the future tends to be down-played in favour of retrospective assessment for selection, certification and progression. • Generic approaches which support learning – such as recording of achievement and action planning – are often offered in specific types of programmes: in the past, these have tended to be used for learners unsure of their direction or as alternatives to 'harder' forms of assessment against external standards. • Many teachers and work-place assessors do not see guidance support and review of progress as 'real' assessment.	Teachers and learners need to: • recognise the importance of guidance, diagnostic assessment and review of progress in making final grades, or summary of achievement, more effective • see all forms of assessment as essential for enabling adults to describe their achievements. Organisations need to: • offer assessment as a range of 'services' at different stages of all learners' experience and offer a wide range of approaches to learners.

Table 3

BELIEF	EFFECTS	HOW A STRATEGY CAN HELP
Formal, externally designed and monitored assessments are the only ways of guaranteeing objectivity and reliability. Subjective judgements have traditionally been associated with teachers' bias or badly designed tests. Although all assessments are the result of a long series of subjective decisions (what to teach, what and how to assess, what constitutes valid, sufficient, authentic evidence), formal, externally designed and monitored assessment is believed to control the observations of assessors and standardise the recording or judgement processes.	• 'Assessment experts' in examining and awarding bodies either use techniques to ensure that assessments produce consistent results or provide teachers with detailed specification of how the evidence should be presented. Many teachers are not involved in defining outcomes or designing criteria for assessing evidence of ability or performance. • Reliance on externally-designed assessment prevents teachers acquiring a wide range of skills, and limits their role to interpreting externally designed specifications.	Teachers need to: • recognise the importance of having a range of assessment skills • use criteria which are as unambiguous as possible and which allow them to monitor and discuss the outcomes of assessment with colleagues and independent verifiers • share expertise between staff from programmes where different approaches to assessment are used • see the importance of drawing inferences about performance from a wide range of different types of evidence.
Precise, external definitions of what is to be assessed will provide clear, unambiguous descriptions of achievement and reliable, consistent results. Detailed and prescriptive specifications of criteria and contexts for measuring performance are believed to produce standardised and objective judgements in assessment.	• Unwieldy and complicated assessment processes can arise from prescriptive and detailed requirements. • Close specification of individual features of a particular activity, and performance criteria to assess it, can make holistic judgements about overall effectiveness difficult. • Attempts to make criteria as specific and unambiguous as possible do not necessarily produce consistency of results or objective judgements by assessors.	Teachers need to: • recognise that external criteria are only one part of a process to make assessment as explicit as possible • appreciate that assessment expertise and common standards are enhanced when they discuss their judgements and assessments with colleagues.

Table 4

Section 4

Providing assessment services

How assessment is organised

Teachers, other assessors and guidance workers are all involved in assessing learners' needs, progress and achievements at a number of different points before, during and at the end of learning programmes. Assessment is therefore carried out for different purposes and may be based on a variety of criteria.

If managers, staff and learners are clear about the purposes and basis of assessment, and the possible approaches which can be used, assessment can be fairer as well as more positive and effective.

This section describes different assessment services needed at appropriate stages in all learning programmes, whether these are based on accreditation of prior learning, accumulation of individual modules or units, or more traditionally designed 'linear' programmes. Each description of an assessment service is followed by some examples of strategies to help implement or improve it. Checklists for further action are provided in Section 5 'Designing an Assessment Strategy'.

Four illustrations of different experiences of assessment are used to highlight some aspects of good practice in assessment services, drawn from examples of good practice in different programmes and agencies. They are not therefore intended to be definitive accounts of good practice but to illustrate a number of key points:

- initial guidance and diagnostic assessment are essential pre-requisites for effective and appropriate entry decisions
- learners receive advice, guidance and diagnostic assessment from a range of formal agencies, networks and staff from particular institutions
- entry decisions vary greatly in the degree of informality and use of formal, explicit selection criteria. Often, however, the criteria for either open access or more restrictive selection are not made explicit to learners
- learners' confidence and ability to be involved in various assessment processes are greatly enhanced when they are clear about why and how assessment is used.

Initial guidance and diagnostic assessment

Purpose of assessment

Assessment before learners apply to join a learning programme enables them to make better choices based on clear information about current levels of achievement. Assessment is used to:

- review and assess previous learning and achievement
- provide information about opportunities and possible routes.

At this stage, the outcomes of assessment are:

- information about skills, knowledge, aptitude, abilities
- an initial action plan showing intended routes of progression.

Type of assessment

Assessment is formative and carried out primarily for the learner. It is a two-way process between learner and guidance worker and/or teacher. It can use the learner's own criteria and/or externally set criteria.

Techniques or methods

These will include:

- helping individuals define and clarify their aspirations
- providing initial guidance and counselling
- using exercises and learning packs to assess direction or aptitude
- negotiating an initial action plan showing appropriate qualifications or programmes to aim for.

Staff/agencies involved

Initial guidance and diagnostic assessment may be carried out by:

- an independent agency funded by the local education authority
- a centralised guidance and assessment unit in an individual college or university, using both generalist and subject specialist staff
- a network of agencies operating in an area and perhaps co-ordinated by the Training Enterprise Council (TEC)
- programme co-ordinators in a college or university
- work-based assessors and supervisors.

An important informal contribution to this process is also often made by friends, relatives and colleagues.

Examples of successful strategies

Some organisations have enhanced their initial guidance and diagnostic assessment by:

- mapping the whole college's provision to show subject specific and core modules, the timing of them, the learning outcomes gained, accreditation and assessment requirements, progression routes into, across and beyond the college (e.g. Wakefield and Wirral Metropolitan Colleges)
- mapping all the opportunities available locally for different forms of accreditation to suit different learners; (e.g. Stockport and Leicestershire TECs)
- identifying the learning outcomes gained from participating in guidance and diagnostic assessment processes (e.g. Wirral Metropolitan College)
- providing databases or information about:
  - employer links and the assessment services they can offer, such as work experience, skills testing, interview practice, etc.
  - outcomes and assessment criteria for each programme, including 'options' or 'electives'
  - awarding body accreditation requirements and APL guidelines.

Useful reading

Assessment in Action (1988) Jennifer Kidd, UDACE.

Delivering Educational Guidance for Adults (1989) Vivienne Rivis, UDACE.

The Quest for Quality in Educational Guidance for Adults (1992) Vivienne Rivis and Jackie Sadler, UDACE.

Educational Guidance Services for Adults (1991) Jane Barrett, UDACE.

All available from the Further Education Unit (FEU), Citadel Place, Spring Gardens, Vauxhall, London SE11 1EH.

INITIAL GUIDANCE	ENTRY TO PROGRAMME	IN-PROGRAMME	CERTIFICATION
• Josephine goes to the local library where she has seen information leaflets about education and training opportunities. The librarian suggests that she makes an appointment with the educational guidance worker based at an adult and community centre. • The guidance worker helps Josephine recognise what skills she already has, what she would like to do and what local opportunities there are. • The guidance worker tells Josephine that accreditation is available, however, if she wants it, in the form of credits offered by the Open College Network. • Josephine does not yet feel confident to apply for a formally accredited course. She decides she would like an informal programme to find out what skills she has and decides to join an evening class in clothes making.	• Josephine goes to the first evening of the clothes making programme and talks to the tutor. The tutor looks at examples of Josephine's previous work and advises her that she has considerable ability. • The tutor suggests that Josephine joins her class since it caters for a wide range of skills and will give her a chance to see if she has the potential for formal accreditation, such as a National Vocational Qualification.	• The tutor helps Josephine assess her own skills by asking her questions about her work, how she carries it out and how she would like to improve. • Josephine is encouraged to identify what targets she would like to use to assess her work and this builds her confidence to look at some of the learning outcomes which can be assessed. • The tutor advises Josephine that she could perhaps eventually gain a City and Guilds NVQ in Fashion. She gives Josephine some examples of City and Guilds statements of competence in Fashion so that she can see what is involved. • Josephine realises she already meets some of the required competences and decides to be assessed for credits at OCN Levels 2 and 3 by submitting a portfolio of evidence.	• The tutor helps Josephine write a summary of her skills and assemble examples of her work in a portfolio. Formal certification is given in the form of credits at OCN Levels 2 and 3. • Josephine decides to apply for a part-time City and Guilds National Vocational Qualification in Fashion at the further education college. She finds that her OCN credits will count through Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL).

Case Study 1 Adult and Community Education

Josephine decides she would like to improve her skills in tailoring and extend what is currently a hobby into the possibility of using it for employment. She has never attended a 'formal' learning programme before and has no idea of what opportunities might be open to her.

Source: National Open College Network

Entry to programme/selection

Purpose of assessment

Assessment at the stage of entry to learning programme and after initial guidance and diagnostic assessment can avoid the inappropriate or inefficient use of teaching resources and learner time and improve retention rates. Assessment is used to:

- ensure that the learner has embarked on a programme that will meet her/his aspirations, abilities and needs
- formalise non-standard entry to a learning programme by waiving entry requirements for learners with alternative qualifications or relevant experience
- grant exemption from parts of the programme
- decide whether accreditation of prior learning is appropriate
- enable the providers of the learning programme to plan the efficient and appropriate use of teaching and physical resources.

At this stage, the outcomes of assessment are:

- information for the teacher or manager of the learning programme about how far the individual learner's skills, knowledge and achievements already meet the requirements of the programme
- a judgement about how far s/he has potential to meet them during the programme.

Type of assessment

Assessment at this stage is summative and although the learner may decide whether the programme is the right one (or not), the assessment is carried out on behalf of managers of programmes and teachers. It uses either externally-set criteria and/or comparison with other candidates/potential learners.

Techniques/methods

These can include:

- assessment of prior learning and achievement
- examination of previous qualifications
- skills testing for demonstration of current competence
- personal interview which may be formal or informal.

Staff/agencies involved

Decisions about entry may be carried out by:

- a centralised institutional admissions team using generalist staff for most decisions, with referrals to subject staff when necessary
- a centralised admissions team drawn from subject staff
- staff from individual programmes or departments
- work-based assessors.

Examples of successful strategies

Some organisations are improving their entry procedures by:

- working with HE admissions tutors to define competence required at entry to their programmes so that adults can provide evidence of these in the absence of the more familiar entry qualifications (e.g. Wakefield College Art Section)
- co-operating with tutors from HE institutions who have franchising arrangements with the college to agree guidelines for the assessment of prior learning for adults (e.g. Derby Tertiary College, Wilmorton).

INITIAL GUIDANCE	ENTRY TO PROGRAMME	IN-PROGRAMME	CERTIFICATION
• Mary goes to the Job Centre and a job centre adviser gives Mary a leaflet about gaining qualifications through Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) offered by the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). • Mary contacts the TEC, who are running an 'Access to Assessment' project in conjunction with local colleges and employers. • A TEC adviser visits Mary at work and interviews her about her experience, current responsibilities and aspirations. She advises Mary that she may be eligible to seek APL towards all units of an NVQ Level 3 in Business and Administration. • She gives Mary a list of the areas of competence the NVQ covers and discusses these with her. Mary decides she would like to seek APL.	• Mary is referred by the TEC to a subject specialist at a local college working with the TEC to provide APL. • Mary takes some examples of work she has produced as part of her job. • A formal interview establishes that Mary is likely to have enough evidence from formal jobs and hotel experience to gain the Level 3 qualification through a portfolio of evidence, with some supplementary assignments to 'test' specific skills and knowledge. • Mary is advised that she is eligible to gain an NVQ through an APL process and will not need to join a learning programme. • The next stage is to devise an individual programme so that Mary can compile her portfolio and do some additional pieces of work.	• Mary and the subject specialist design an individual programme consisting of three tutorial/review sessions with the subject adviser and three meetings with the general TEC adviser to oversee the portfolio compilation. She will carry out the compilation of evidence at work and in her own time. • The TEC adviser helps Mary find evidence to meet the NVQ assessment criteria. She uses her work-place to collect and assemble evidence, and asks colleagues and managers to confirm her skills and responsibilities in written testimonials. She also uses evidence from the family hotel business. • The subject specialist provides some extra assignments to cover skills and knowledge where evidence from work is not available. She carries these out at work, with support and help from her employer. • A subject assessor interviews Mary, samples evidence from the portfolio and uses questions to elicit extra information. • The assessor asks for some more evidence where she feels there are gaps and provides Mary with some set tasks to carry out.	• Mary submits the final portfolio for assessment and verification by the awarding body. • When the assessor and verifier are satisfied that Mary has met all the requirements, she is awarded an RSA NVQ Level 3 in Business and Administration.

Case Study 2 National Vocational Qualification Level 3

Mary left school at 15 with no formal qualifications. She has worked in a variety of office and administrative jobs as well as running a hotel with her family. The firm where she has worked for seven years is to close down and she would like to apply for a post with more responsibility.

Source: Leicestershire TEC

Review of progress/In-programme assessment

Purpose of assessment

Assessment during a programme can ensure that the learning programme meets the targets for achievement identified in an action plan or learning agreement and in requirements for accreditation. Assessment is used to:

- review and record progress within the learning programme
- provide the learner with the necessary feedback and hopefully the motivation for him/her to benefit from the programme
- provide the teacher with information about learners' future needs for learning resources and support
- provide opportunities for meeting requirements towards a final grade or summary of achievement.

At this stage, the outcome of assessment is:

- information for both the learner and the teacher about progress and achievement.

Type of assessment

Assessment is both formative and summative (see Figure 2) and is carried out for learners and teachers. It uses different combinations of externally-set criteria, comparison with other learners and the learner's own criteria.

Techniques/methods

These can include:

- design of an action plan during an induction
- guidance and tutorial support
- 'assessment on demand' – tests, projects, assignments, work experience
- in-course portfolio preparation recording achievements.

Staff/agencies involved

Review and assessment may be carried out by:

- personal tutors
- subject staff
- staff drawn from across the organisation to review progress with learners from a range of programmes
- work-based supervisors and assessors.

Examples of successful strategies

Some organisations are enhancing their in-programme assessment by:

- devising initial diagnostic exercises for vocational and academic programmes at different levels (e.g. Rotherham College)
- collaborating with tutors from HE to define learning outcomes and appropriate assessment methods to prepare learners for progression from an Access to HE programme into HE itself (e.g. Merseyside Open College Federation)
- assisting lecturers to define learning outcomes and show how they will be assessed for modules across an institution (e.g. Liverpool John Moores University)
- providing:
  - learner materials for APL/assembling a portfolio
  - a range of assessment tests/assignments at all stages of assessment
  - tutorial time recognised and provided for within organisational staffing arrangements
  - summaries of learning outcomes and related assessment methods written in accessible, straight-forward language.

INITIAL GUIDANCE	ENTRY TO PROGRAMME	IN-PROGRAMME	CERTIFICATION
• Ranjit goes to the careers service who provide information about possible routes into social work and refer her to the FE college. • The college has information/leaflets on each of the four different programmes which show what outcomes Ranjit could gain and what progression opportunities might arise from them. • An adviser from the college admissions service discusses the different programmes and helps Ranjit evaluate her personal circumstances, her aspirations and what she might do long-term. The adviser provides information about discretionary awards, fee arrangements, regulations about income support. • Ranjit and the adviser also discuss Ranjit's preferred type of learning programme. The adviser refers her to the relevant programme tutor for informal discussion and further guidance. • After talking to the tutor, Ranjit eventually decides that the Access to HE programme might be her best route.	• Ranjit submits a formal application letter to join the Access to HE programme and has an interview. • The programme tutor explains that the purpose of the formal interview is to decide whether Ranjit can benefit from the programme. • The tutor explains how the programme is run, what its aims are and what it might lead to. She asks Ranjit questions about what she hopes to do eventually and how she thinks she will benefit from the programme. • The tutor makes a decision that Ranjit can benefit from the programme and that she understands the requirements, work-load, etc. • She offers her a place and Ranjit decides to join the programme.	• Each learner has an induction and an opportunity to make a 'learning agreement' about personal goals and targets with tutors for each module. • The personal tutor and subject tutors see each learner at regular, timetabled intervals to review progress, identify areas of difficulty and further targets. • The programme team have devised a set of learning outcomes for reviewing progress and helping learners assess their potential for study in Higher Education. • Assignments are designed and assessed to cover these learning outcomes. • The achievement of outcomes is recorded at regular intervals.	• The awarding of a kitemarked 'Access to HE' certificate is based on the accumulation of in-programme assessments and a final examination. This provides proof that learners have achieved the required learning outcomes at a standard suitable for entry to Higher Education.

Case Study 3 Access to Higher Education Programme

Ranjit has been a care assistant for three years and wonders if she is able to do a degree in Sociology and eventually become a social worker. She has some GCSEs gained five years ago and is also a voluntary part-time youth worker.

Source: S.E. Derbyshire College, Access Unit

Certification

Purpose of assessment

Assessment at the end of individual modules or the whole learning programme provides formal proof of achievement at a specified level and recognises this with a formal record or certificate which may be used as evidence for selection for employment, FE or HE.

Assessment is used to:

- collate evidence from previous achievements that can be used for accreditation for all or part of an award
- enable the learner to demonstrate her/his achievements in a way that will make the best use of progression opportunities available.

At this stage, the outcome of assessment is:

- information for employers, LEAs and Funding Councils and admissions tutors at higher levels in the form of an award of a credit or qualification.

Type of assessment

Assessment at this stage is summative and although it provides proof of achievement for the learner, it is carried out for funders, employers and admissions staff in other sectors. It uses either externally-set criteria and/or comparison with other candidates.

Techniques/methods

These will include:

- skills tests, phase tests, examinations
- accumulated evidence of competences and/or grades
- preparation of a final record of achievement or portfolio
- provision of a formal certificate and other appropriate information, e.g. testimonials, references.

Staff/agencies involved

Certification may be carried out by:

- a centralised unit using information provided by subject tutors, external verifiers, moderators and/or examiners appointed by the awarding body
- personal tutors who co-ordinate references or other statements of achievement from a number of staff
- work-based assessors.

Examples of approaches

Some organisations have made access to certification more flexible by:

- working with local employers to devise in-company training programmes and assessment methods for accreditation towards a degree under the HE Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) e.g. (Sheffield Hallam University)
- training work-based assessors to assess and accredit elements of competence in NVQs in conjunction with college-based assessors (e.g. Stroud College).

Methods and techniques

In the preceding section, a range of techniques and methods have been listed to show that they are used in different ways at each stage. Figure 3 is intended to demonstrate that teachers, learners and other assessors need to be able to adopt a range of assessment techniques according to the purposes and outcomes at the various stages illustrated in the model.

INITIAL GUIDANCE	ENTRY TO PROGRAMME	IN-PROGRAMME	CERTIFICATION
• Gary applies to the polytechnic for a possible part-time degree. • He is referred to the adviser for Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) at the polytechnic. • The adviser interviews Gary and discusses his previous certificated learning and relevant work and fellowship experience. • He is advised to compile and present a portfolio with details of relevant experience and to attend two 'Make Your Experience Count' sessions which help learners identify and present their experience.	• He submits a portfolio to a subject specialist to see if he is eligible for specific credits towards a degree. • The subject specialist assesses the portfolio and discusses the relevance of Gary's previous experience and learning to the BEd. • Gary is awarded credits for his previous certificated learning and the experience gained during the fellowship year. • He is told he can therefore enter the BEd at Level 3 to complete credits towards a degree.	• Gary and a personal tutor assigned to part-time students design an individualised programme which consists of a Contextual Study and a School-Based Enquiry. • He completes these through independent study and flexible tutorial support. The tutor is available to help Gary with the progress of his work and to provide advice about sources of information and ways of approaching his studying. • The pieces of work are graded by the tutor.	• Gary submits his work for credits at Level 3 to complete his degree. • The tutor and examiner assess the work and Gary is awarded a BEd degree.

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Case Study 4 Credit Accumulation and Transfer for BA Honours Degree

Gary is a practising teacher in Craft, Design and Technology who spent a year's teacher fellowship producing materials and teaching packages for design projects in school, funded by the LEA. He would like to upgrade his original teaching qualification to a degree but is unlikely to be given further release or financial support by the LEA.

Source: University of Northumbria at Newcastle

An assessment strategy could include staff development and training activities to help teachers and assessors to:

- relate methods and techniques more clearly to the purpose of assessment
- draw on a wider repertoire of methods
- share good practice from different agencies and learning programmes
- consider whether the methods they currently use are adapted appropriately to the purpose of assessment.

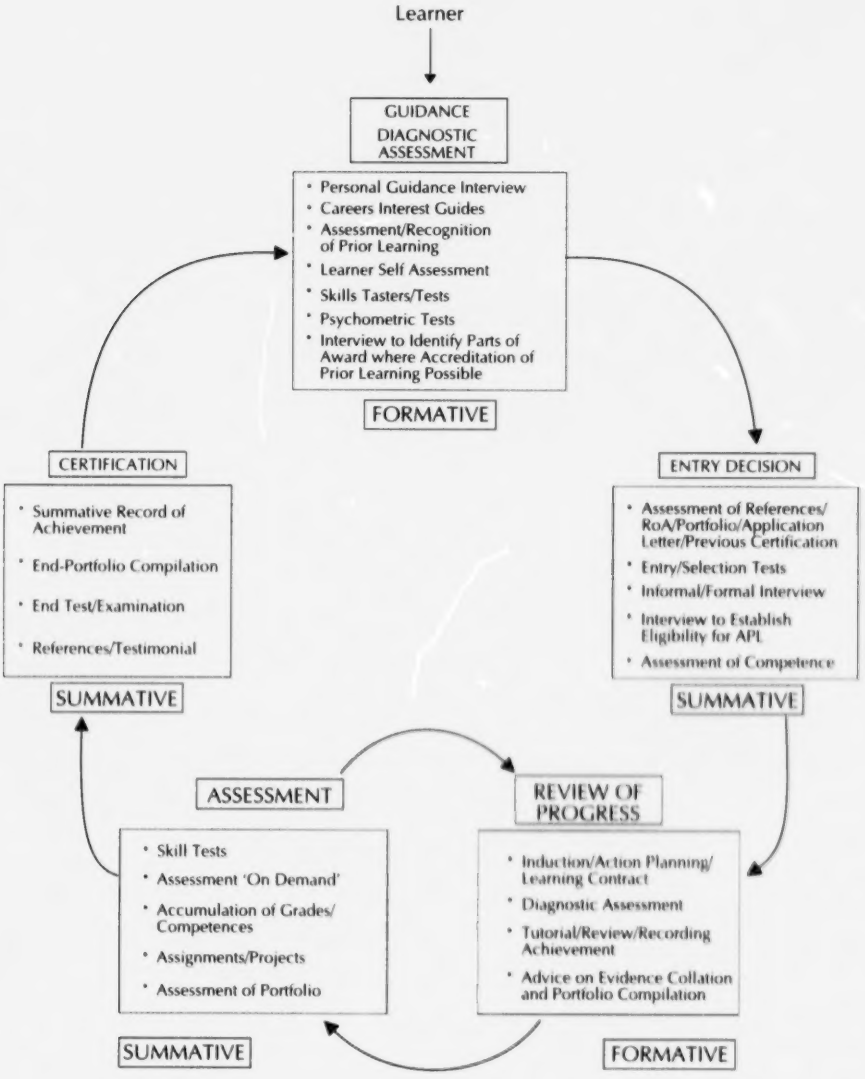

Figure 3 Assessment Methods

Organisational arrangements

Different arrangements are possible for offering the range of assessment services, described in the last section, particularly in further education colleges or higher education institutions. These are briefly summarised here.

Dispersed throughout an organisation

This model is prevalent in many education and training organisations. Initial guidance, admissions, assessment and accreditation are all carried out for each programme or subject area through teaching and tutorial roles. Other staff, such as workplace assessors, are involved in assessment of learners when appropriate and this is negotiated by programme staff. Different services are sometimes specifically resourced and time-tabled from each programme's budget.

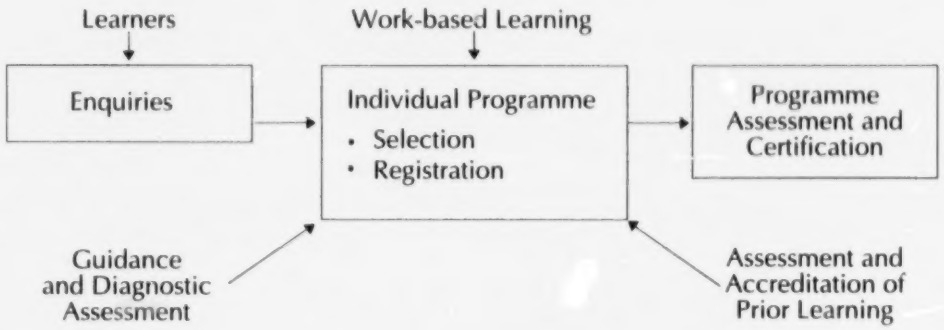

Figure 4 Dispersed Throughout an Organisation

Advantages of this model are:

- it requires no centralised top-slicing of resources
- guidance, assessment and accreditation processes can be adapted to the particular needs of each programme.

Disadvantages might be:

- the amount of time spent on different kinds of assessment is likely to vary considerably from programme to programme
- without co-ordination, it is difficult to gain an overview of good practice or to share staff expertise
- learners wishing to combine elements of different programmes or to change programmes may find this difficult.

Accreditation of Prior Learning Service

Some further education colleges and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) offer a free-standing APL service for the accreditation of competence acquired outside formal programmes towards a range of NVQs. A number of arrangements are possible and may be co-ordinated by an APL manager:

- individual programme areas market an APL service alongside their other programmes and specialist staff undertake initial guidance, portfolio compilation, assessment and accreditation, using infill into other programmes for individual 'top-up' training where necessary
- initial guidance and portfolio preparation is provided by a central unit with portfolio compilation, testing of competence and assessment and accreditation carried out by specialist staff.

A number of colleges are participating in assessment services for NVQs co-ordinated by the local Training and Enterprise Council. These involve various agencies for referral, guidance, compilation of portfolios of evidence and the design of individualised programmes for accreditation. The assessment model shows that this particular form of accreditation can become part of an overall strategy rather than being seen as a separate, 'bolt-on' service.

Figure 5 shows how APL fits into the overall organisation of assessment services.

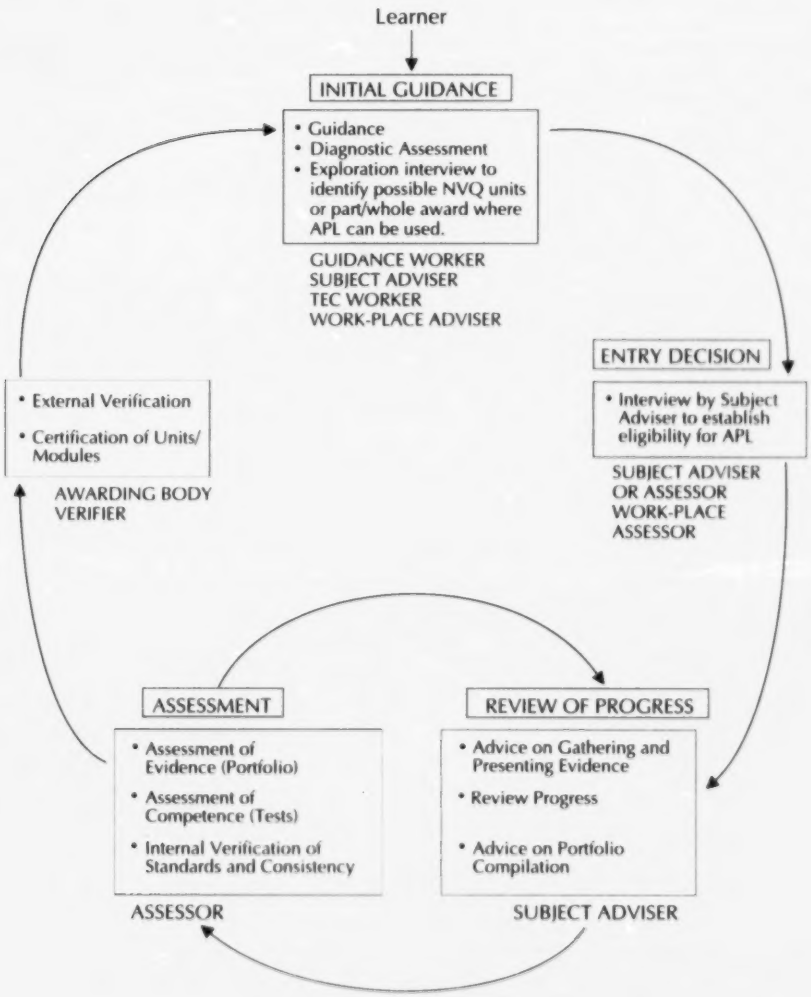

Figure 5 Accreditation of Prior Learning

Centralised 'assessment centre' or co-ordinated services

A small number of further education colleges have set up a special 'assessment centre' providing either an integrated system of services or a specific service for all learners or particular cohorts of learners (see Figure 6). These services can include guidance and diagnostic assessment, admissions procedures, review of progress through tutorials, registration and certification. These may:

- be centrally located in one building
- bring together a range of assessment functions across the organisation co-ordinated by a senior or middle manager responsible for assessment and accreditation across the whole organisation
- require local agencies such as Training and Enterprise Councils, careers and guidance services and colleges to work together to provide a range of services.

Centralised services may be for:

- particular cohorts of prospective learners, e.g. all adults or learners unsure of their abilities or the options available
- all prospective learners.

Services can be carried out by:

- generalist guidance and admissions staff who refer learners to specialist subject staff when necessary
- staff on a rota from different subject and vocational areas who are trained and/or experienced in guidance and assessment skills
- a pool of personal tutors to provide tutorial support and time-tabled reviews of learning progress.

A growing number of colleges are deploying non-lecturing staff for initial guidance and diagnostic assessment, review of learning progress and to help learners identify evidence towards a portfolio or record of achievement.

Advantages of this model are:

- good practice and staff expertise can be identified and shared more easily
- staff training and development needs in assessment skills can be provided across the whole organisation more cost-effectively than on a programme-by-programme basis
- resources for centralised assessment services can be top-sliced from programme budgets
- learners' needs can be identified and met more impartially than is the case in assessment offered solely through individual programmes
- organisations can decide on levels of entitlement to different assessment services which are applicable to all programmes and learners.

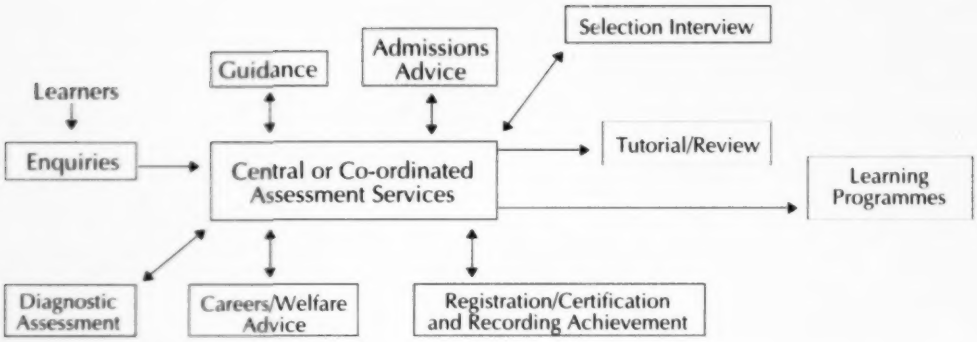

Figure 6 Centralised 'Assessment Centre' or Co-ordinated Services

Summary of assessment services

Figure 7 is a summary of all the services that can be offered. It can either be used as a reference chart or a development tool to review and audit existing services across the organisation, or within a particular programme.

Purpose of Assessment	Learner Wants	Organisation Provides/Has Access To
Initial Guidance • to enable learner to make choices based on clear information about options and own abilities	• assessment for career direction • assessment for aptitude • design of a learning agreement or action plan • review and assessment of prior learning • assessment to select appropriate programme ASSESSMENT IS CARRIED OUT JOINTLY BETWEEN LEARNER AND PERSON IN GUIDANCE ROLE	• database of organisational local and national programmes • details of modules, assessment/ accreditation/progression routes • details of other agencies' APL arrangements and provision • information on costs/fees/grants • access to work experience placements which allow learners to diagnose their needs and existing abilities
Entry to Programme • to provide information for teacher/manager of programme • to provide learner with a programme that meets needs abilities and aspirations	• entry to learning programme (maybe without having traditional entry qualifications) • decision about suitability for accreditation for parts of the programme via APL • assessment of prior learning ASSESSMENT IS CARRIED OUT BY PERSON MAKING ENTRY DECISION	• database of organisational programmes, modules, assessment, accreditation, progression opportunities • awarding body APL guidelines • APL procedures/guidelines for each learning programme • access to a range of skills tests/assignments • access to work-place assessment • clear outcomes and assessment methods designed for all programmes
In-Programme • to provide information for teachers and learners about progress, achievements and future needs	• review of progress • recognition of achievement • diagnosis of further needs/learning targets • opportunities to record achievements • accumulation of grades/competences ASSESSMENT IS CARRIED OUT JOINTLY BETWEEN TEACHERS AND LEARNERS	• learning action plan • tutorial support for review and on-going guidance • access to a bank of flexible/open learning assignments • provision of work experience • provision of review/diagnosis with all staff
Certification • to provide information for employers, providers and admissions tutors	• to be able to articulate what she has gained • proof of attainment in the form of certificate/record of achievement • formal accreditation of prior learning ASSESSMENT IS CARRIED OUT BY PERSON CERTIFICATING ACHIEVEMENT	• employee/HE application procedures • HE admissions requirements • flexible payment/registration certification arrangements

Figure 7 Summary of Assessment Services

Staff Involved	Agencies/People Who Offer the Service	Techniques and Methods
• careers officer/adviser • guidance worker • college/university central admissions • college/university guidance worker • college/university vocational/ academic staff • TEC staff • college/university assessment and accreditation manager	• guidance services • institution's central admissions • institution's vocational/academic programme areas • Open College Network (OCN) tutors • adult education (AE) staff	• personal guidance interview • careers interest guides • learner self-assessment exercises • assessing current competences • skills 'tasters' • work experience for assessment or diagnosis of aptitude • initial diagnostic assessment • guidance interview: - general - subject specific • portfolio building workshops
• APL adviser • APL guidance/mentor • vocational/academic tutor/trainer • assessment/accreditation manager • admissions staff	• vocational/academic programmes • central admissions/ assessment unit • OCN tutors • AE tutors	• assessing skills, knowledge, understanding • examination of references, application letters, portfolios • selection interview: - formal and informal • tests
• personal tutor • vocational/academic assessors • awarding body moderator/verifier • careers officer/guidance worker	• organisation where learning programme is taking place: - individual staff - college assessment unit • OCN tutors • AE tutors	• learning contract • in-course portfolio compilation • recording achievement • learning assignments • one-to-one/group/peer review • skills tests • a wide range of assessment exercises – oral, written, practical
• personal tutor • vocational/academic assessors • awarding body moderator/verifier • careers officer/guidance worker	• vocational/academic staff • college central assessment unit • OCN tutors • AE tutors	• summative Record of Achievement • end-course portfolio • end example/test/assignment

Figure 7 (continued)

Section 5

Designing an Assessment Strategy

This section provides guidelines for designing an assessment policy and a strategy for implementing it.

An assessment policy

The stated mission and overall ethos of particular organisations will determine how they organise and offer assessment, and whether they require a policy and strategy for embedding assessment services into learning programmes. A mission statement therefore outlines, in broad terms, what the organisation stands for. Some organisations develop policy statements for particular aspects of their provision – for example, access for more adult learners or equal opportunities for all learners.

In addition to general policy statements, some organisations have found it useful to identify specific targets for access to assessment and accreditation. These targets may be incorporated in development plans, curriculum policy statements and staff development activities. They can all be part of an assessment policy. The process of designing an assessment policy helps an organisation formalise its commitment to providing accessible and flexible assessment services. It also provides a basis for developing an organisational strategy which enables staff to implement a range of services.

An assessment policy can also form the foundation for information given to learners which explains what they can expect from a particular organisation's approach to assessment and how this will be used to enhance their skills as independent learners.

A checklist for designing an assessment strategy

A strategy outlines steps towards achieving the policy goals embodied in institutional statements. It can be based on a series of detailed objectives and planned targets for the whole organisation or for particular programmes or groups of learners. Components of a strategy may include:

- managing an organisational audit; how effectively are the services described in Figure 7, for example, offered?
- phasing in the introduction of initial guidance and diagnostic assessment, perhaps starting with certain groups such as adults who are unemployed, and extending eventually to all programmes
- requiring all programmes to specify entry criteria and show how these are assessed
- introducing Records of Achievement for all learners
- offering training for all staff in assessment.

These are intended as examples; this guide can be used to review existing assessment arrangements and derive appropriate components of an assessment strategy which suits the requirements of each organisation.

Stages in designing an assessment strategy

This checklist is intended to help organisations identify stages in designing an assessment strategy.

- Examine organisation's overall mission, institutional development plan, curriculum development plans, internal evaluation/review processes (including evaluation by learners), quality assurance procedures to identify areas which might require specific policy objectives relating to the organisation of assessment. (For example, the intention to widen access for specific groups of learners will affect how assessment is offered to them)
- Identify implications for assessment services of institutional plans that aim to develop links with employers, widening community participation or access to higher education
- Identify or design appropriate policy statements and derive objectives from them
- Review assessment services currently offered:

  (a) centralised or co-ordinated across the organisation

  (b) within individual programmes

  - location
  - frequency
  - staffing
  - resource allocation
  - specialist services
  - methods used
- Identify areas of good practice and areas for change, including a training needs analysis for developing staff skills
- Design strategy for implementing policy objectives with plans for phased change and targets:

  (a) across the organisation

  (b) within programme areas

  These could be in relation to overall themes, for example:

  - access for adult learners
  - work-based learning
  - Records of Achievement or in relation to particular types of assessment service, such as those shown in the model
- Identify action needed/staff involved
- Plan procedures for monitoring and review, including learner evaluation
- Identify mechanisms for feeding back information derived from these processes, such as annual institutional development plans.

The checklists that follow are provided to review different assessment services. They are based on *Flexible Colleges: Access to learning and qualifications in further education*, parts 1 and 2, Further Education Unit, 1992.

GUIDANCE AND DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

Agency will need to provide or have access to services for:

- Guidance/Counselling
- Initial Diagnostic Assessment
- Assessment of Prior Learning and Achievement

WHOLE ORGANISATION	CURRICULUM AREA	PROGRAMME TEAM	OTHER AGENCY

AUDIT QUESTION	EVIDENCE	ACTION PLAN	
		ACTION NEEDED	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
1) Can learners readily gain guidance and information throughout the year? - within organisation itself - provided by other agencies.	Monitoring use of services. Learners' evaluation of assistance in defining/clarifying aspirations, needs, choices. **Information** • Databases		
2) Can learners obtain general/subject specific initial diagnostic assessment (IDA)?	IDA available in congenial, accessible surroundings staffed by trained personnel. **Information** • Self-assessment and other packages/ exercises		
3) Can learners negotiate an initial action plan (IAP)?	Learners leave this assessment stage with an IAP, whether embarking on a programme or not.		
4) Are these services co-ordinated with other forms of guidance and assessment? - in other parts of the organisation? - with other agencies?	Audit of existing services identification of potential/actual co-ordination.		

GUIDANCE AND DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT		WHOLE ORGANISATION	CURRICULUM AREA	PROGRAMME TEAM	OTHER AGENCY
AUDIT QUESTION	**EVIDENCE**	**ACTION PLAN**			
		ACTION NEEDED		**PERSON RESPONSIBLE**	
5) How are guidance and diagnostic assessment resourced? - as a free-standing central service - as part of individual programmes - from external sources (e.g. TECs)	Audit/monitoring of existing arrangements.				
6) Do staff have access to training in guidance and diagnostic assessment skills?	Staff with TDLB awards and other in-service guidance/assessment training. Information about opportunities for further training. Audit of staff deployment.				

ENTRY TO LEARNING PROGRAMMES

Agency will need to have appropriate procedures for entry, taking into account the particular requirements of each programme

WHOLE ORGANISATION	CURRICULUM AREA	PROGRAMME TEAM	OTHER AGENCY

AUDIT QUESTION	EVIDENCE	ACTION PLAN	
		ACTION NEEDED	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
1) Does each programme have explicit entry criteria?	Statements of intended learning outcomes, criteria.		
2) Do entry procedures provide adequate opportunities for learners to show their potential/current skills and knowledge?	Audit of good practice and existing entry procedures.		
3) Are learners made aware of how entry decisions are made?	Learner's evaluation.		
4) Are opportunities provided for learners to receive accreditation of prior learning?	**Information** • Awarding body guidelines on APL • Monitoring learners recruited for APL.		
5) Do staff receive training in interviewing and selection skills?			
6) Are there opportunities for entry at different times in the year?			

REVIEW OF PROGRESS Agency will need to provide frequent opportunities for all learners to have access to tutorial support, on-going guidance and recording of achievement		WHOLE ORGANISATION	CURRICULUM AREA	PROGRAMME TEAM	OTHER AGENCY
AUDIT QUESTION	**EVIDENCE**	**ACTION PLAN**			
		ACTION NEEDED		**PERSON RESPONSIBLE**	
1) Is time built into each programme for individual learners to discuss their progress?	Staff can identify when tutorial support and review of progress takes place. Review of timetables.				
2) Can learners obtain diagnostic assessment and action planning at the beginning, during and end of their programme?	Learners/staff evaluation.				
3) Are learners given the opportunity to record achievement/assemble a portfolio of evidence?	Standard format for Record of Achievement/portfolio.				
4) Are learners made aware of how review of progress can help them?	Learners/staff evaluation.				

IN-PROGRAMME ASSESSMENT

Agency will need to ensure that learners can seek assessment of their achievements whenever they are ready

WHOLE ORGANISATION	CURRICULUM AREA	PROGRAMME TEAM	OTHER AGENCY

AUDIT QUESTION	EVIDENCE	ACTION PLAN	
		ACTION NEEDED	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
1) Are learners able to accumulate competences/grades/credits at regular intervals?	Access to 'Assessment on Demand'.		
2) Do programmes plan a number of summative assessment points?	Time-tabled and planned assessment.		
3) Are the results of in-programme summative assessment used to enhance review of progress?	Use of Record of Achievement. Review of use of tutorial time.		
4) Can learners receive accreditation of their achievements if they do not complete the programme or qualification?	**Information** • Administration arrangements • Awarding body guidelines.		
5) Are review opportunities provided and time-tabled?			

CERTIFICATION Agency will need to provide flexible opportunities to accredit modules/units/whole awards and information about achievement		WHOLE ORGANISATION	CURRICULUM AREA	PROGRAMME TEAM	OTHER AGENCY
AUDIT QUESTION	**EVIDENCE**	**ACTION PLAN**			
		ACTION NEEDED		**PERSON RESPONSIBLE**	
1) Do learners have access to flexible accumulation of units/credits?	Administration arrangements for registration, certification. Degree of modularisation available.				
2) Do learners receive additional information in the form of references, testimonials, etc.?	Employers'/admissions tutors' evaluation.				
3) Are there a range of end-tests/ assessments available?					
4) Is account taken of what information is required for different end-users?					
5) Is the status of Record of Achievement and its 'authorship' clear?	**INFORMATION** Audit/learners and staff evaluation.				

Section 6

Organising Assessment Services

Developing the assessment skills of staff

The assessment framework outlined in this publication can be used by organisations to identify which roles, skills and qualities staff need if they are to provide successful and flexible assessment. Awarding bodies require that staff delivering NVQs and GNVQs must be trained and accredited as assessors. This provides the opportunity for organisations to review how staff can improve their assessment skills. Competence-based occupational standards from the Training Development Lead Body (TDLB) are being used by an increasing number of further education colleges and universities as a framework for professional training in assessment skills.

This guide can help organisations to review how they provide staff development in assessment skills.

Assessment may be carried out by:

- staff appointed for a particular role (e.g. guidance, admissions decisions, initial diagnostic assessment and review of progress)
- staff who carry out a whole range of assessment roles as part of their teaching or work-place supervision and training responsibilities.

A growing number of colleges are employing non-lecturing staff in assessment roles:

- APL advisers to help learners gather evidence for portfolios, to provide information about costs and to make arrangements for individualised programmes, specialist vocational inputs
- assessment supervisors to oversee the recording of competences for NVQs
- study supervisors to monitor progress and attendance, develop action plans and co-ordinate a learner's Record of Achievement.

Their roles, and the skills they encompass, are identified in Figure 8:

- enabling learners to recognise their skills and potential and what options are open to them
- enabling learners to recognise and value their previous experience, learning and achievement
- tutoring and reviewing progress with learners
- assessing previous learning and achievement as part of selection/entry decisions
- certificating prior learning and current competence
- designing and administering examinations, tests and other assessments.

An assessment strategy can therefore include specific initiatives to:

- identify the range of staff roles and skills to fulfil different purposes of assessment
- identify and disseminate the good practice which exists informally on different programmes, and use it as a basis for staff training
- provide accreditation for any training or development undertaken by staff.

Examples of successful strategies

A number of organisations have used specific strategies to build on and disseminate good practice and raise the level of staff skills:

- **Management of assessment**
  - creating 'assessment manager' roles in order to co-ordinate approaches to assessment and accreditation (e.g. Wirral Metropolitan College, Milton Keynes College)
  - using cross-organisational groups responsible for other initiatives and development projects (such as Records of Achievement, APL services) to disseminate information and identify common links between different initiatives (e.g. Croydon College)
  - producing a regular bulletin which informs staff about current projects in curriculum development and assessment (e.g. Milton Keynes College)
  - requiring course and programme teams to design 'quality assurance' criteria for flexible assessment and accreditation in their programmes (e.g. Wakefield College).
- **Staff training and development**
  - requiring all staff across a college's entire range of programmes to undertake training and accreditation using competence-based standards for assessment developed by the TDLB (e.g. Manchester College of Arts and Technology)
  - carrying out peer group moderation of colleagues' assessment on different programmes and sharing good practice (e.g. National Open College Network)
  - establishing a network across the organisation to share good practice in portfolio preparation on different programmes and to develop techniques of self/peer assessment and learning contracts (e.g. University of Northumbria at Newcastle).
  - requiring tutors and lecturers to define learning outcomes and design appropriate assessment across a wide range of accredited and non-accredited programmes (e.g. Wandsworth Adult Education College, Liverpool John Moores University, National Open College Network)
  - reflecting the assessment processes staff are expected to deliver by using APL towards a management level NVQ for staff who are providing accreditation of prior learning to local firms and individual learners (e.g. South and East Cheshire TEC)
  - providing a weekly cross-institutional staff development and meeting time by timetabling all staff free from formal teaching for two hours (Milton Keynes College).
- **Other strategies could include:**
  - co-ordinating administration and registration procedures across an organisation
  - defining and analysing the skills and qualities needed for successful assessment as part of a training needs analysis.

GUIDANCE/INITIAL DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT	ENTRY TO PROGRAMME	IN-PROGRAMME	CERTIFICATION
• provide materials/facilities to enable learners to identify current competence* • refer to other agencies/individuals for information* • assess abilities, skills, aptitude • assess prior achievement and what opportunities it provides for different progression routes/programmes* • provide information and advice on how to identify learning opportunities relevant to a learner's needs* • promote confidence and self-esteem • use assessments made by other relevant individuals and summarise*	• provide materials/activities (where appropriate) to enable learners to demonstrate skills, knowledge • provide and explain criteria for entry decisions • use assessments made by other relevant individuals and summarise* • provide positive and clear feedback* • use a variety of types of evidence to assess achievement	• use valid, reliable and relevant information about learners' progress using sources and formats agreed by the learner* • use fair, justifiable interpretations of information to identify learners' needs for further guidance/counselling* • summarise accurately information and inferences about learners' needs* • use a variety of types of evidence to assess achievement • adapt individual learning contracts/plans* • give constructive feedback from specific, identified sources* • assist individuals to interpret feedback* • draw up an assessment plan* • help learners identify appropriate evidence* • design and provide a range of tests, questions and assignments from which to draw evidence	• provide a summary of results and achievement • collate information and assessments from relevant individuals and summarise* • write references/testimonials • design and provide a range of tests, questions and assignments from which to draw evidence

Figure 8 Staff Skills

This figure is a summary of activities carried out at different stages of assessment which have implications for developing staff skills. The list includes some of the Training Development Lead Body NVQ elements of competence and these are marked*

Resourcing assessment and accreditation

Arrangements for funding learning through the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) offer an opportunity to review how learning programmes, assessment and accreditation are funded and costed for learners and other customers such as employers. It also offers the opportunity to explore ways of demonstrating both institutional effectiveness and a wide range of different learners' achievements.

The degree of flexibility which can be created depends largely on methods for funding learning programmes and different assessment and accreditation services. Resources for the guidance and assessment services needed to support different programmes could be based on a model of achievement which shows the starting points of each learner and the additional outcomes gained by participating in a particular programme. This would be derived from clear specifications of learning outcomes across an institution. However, issues related to funding and definitions of achievement are complex and sensitive. The purpose of this section is to summarise some of the main issues.

Models of funding have traditionally been based on:

- the number of learners participating in learning programmes as full-time equivalent students (FTEs)
- the attainment of qualifications or specified outputs (such as progression to 'higher levels' of education and training and employment).

The first tends to encourage maximum recruitment rather than maximum achievement whilst the second could reinforce exclusion and disadvantage by encouraging institutions and agencies to recruit only those learners who are likely to achieve funding-related outcomes. Both problems emphasise the need for agencies to review how they offer guidance, diagnostic assessment and how they make selection and entry decisions.

There are a number of reasons for considering a different approach to resourcing assessment and accreditation:

- institutional efficiency and accountability can be demonstrated by producing visible, cost-effective indicators of achievement in return for public funding
- resourcing based on student enrolments limits the use of teacher/learner 'contact' time instead of supporting flexible access to assessment and accreditation of achievement. Assessment services may be perceived as too expensive when considered in this narrow resource framework because they appear to use additional staff time rather than being seen as part of the learning programmes
- a definition of 'achievement' can link assessment more clearly to a broad range of learning outcomes which require different assessment services to help learners achieve them.

Linking resourcing to assessment of learning outcomes could:

- encourage teachers and managers to assess learners' starting points and previous achievements and what they gain from following programmes in a particular institution (the 'value-added' or 'learning gain' they offer learners)
- enable organisations to be clear about what learning outcomes arise from their particular mission or values.

There are, however, currently a number of barriers to attaching resources to the assessment and accreditation of learning outcomes:

- existing processes to involve teachers, learners, funders and employers in the definition and assessment of learning outcomes are not sufficiently sophisticated or cost-effective for resourcing to be based on them
- there is resistance to resourcing achievement based on narrow definitions of outcome (e.g. levels and numbers of qualifications). There is a perception amongst many teachers and managers of learning programmes that 'achievement' is too nebulous to be defined to the satisfaction of funders, teachers and learners and that a narrow definition constrains assessment and recognition of other important achievements.

If resources are linked to the assessment and accreditation of achievements, a definition of 'achievement' based on outputs or a range of learning outcomes will fundamentally affect how assessment and accreditation are offered to learners.

Useful reading

Resourcing Tomorrow's College (1992) Mike Field, FEU Occasional Paper.

Recurrent Funding Methodology (1993) Further Education Funding Council Circulars 93/14, 93/16, 93/20, 93/32.

Assessing Achievement (1993) Further Education Funding Council Circular 93/28.

Section 7

Recent Developments in Assessment

This section outlines some approaches which have been adopted by different agencies to widen access to assessment and accreditation. It summarises key features of these approaches and discusses some of the barriers that prevent them from being successfully implemented. Recognising the advantages and limitations of each one might help make them more easily incorporated into an overall strategy on assessment.

Defining and assessing learning outcomes

Learning outcomes represent all the gains from learning. These benefits include knowledge, personal skills, self-awareness, study and learning skills and occupational competence. Many practitioners recognise that better definitions of learning outcomes can help learners and other parties such as employers, admissions tutors and funders to recognise a broader range of achievements. There are therefore a number of reasons for developing more coherent approaches to defining and assessing learning outcomes:

- each learning programme in further, adult and higher education has a different way of presenting and assessing outcomes. In many programmes, there may be little connection between what learners actually gain, the assessment they receive, and certification of achievement
- where outcomes are made explicit, they are usually expressed in different formats or styles from each other. Various qualifications and programmes encompass and assess different types of achievements. The presentation of these outcomes is often inaccessible to learners, teachers, employers and admissions tutors
- many learners are not aware of what outcomes are being assessed. Outcomes such as confidence, motivation, presentation, analysis of own performance, ability to set targets, or critical thinking are often implicitly assessed and are also 'embedded' in assessment and learning activities
- important gains made by learners through 'electives' or 'options' provided outside the formal programmes are often unrecognised. Learners also gain valuable outcomes from work experience and from participating in guidance, tutorials and other assessment services
- curriculum and staff development are greatly enhanced when teachers are required to define outcomes and then identify how they will be assessed.

However, although there are benefits from finding better approaches to defining and assessing learning outcomes, there may also be difficulties in doing this:

- involving teachers, learners, employers and admissions tutors in defining and assessing outcomes can be time-consuming and can appear onerous, especially when examining and awarding bodies have already specified certain outcomes for accreditation purposes

- defining all the gains from learning and requiring that they are recognised through assessment can result in an unwieldy assessment and recording system which is difficult to use.

An organisation or agency therefore has to ensure that the purpose of defining and assessing learning outcomes arises from the needs of a particular programme, organisational mission or different groups of learners. Some organisations may therefore decide to examine different approaches in order to:

- be clear about the 'value-added' or 'learning gain' which their own programmes or organisational ethos can provide for learners
- work with other agencies to examine entry or progression requirements in order to prepare learners for these
- enable better access and progression through providing much clearer information about what learners can realistically expect to gain from participating in different programmes
- involve learners in defining and assessing outcomes which are important to them
- co-operate with employers to find out what outcomes are important and to examine whether these are assessed and recorded
- provide guidelines for staff for writing learning outcomes and designing assessment criteria.

Useful reading

Understanding Learning Outcomes (1989) Sue Otter, UDACE.

Learning Outcomes in Higher Education (1992) UDACE.

(Both available from the Further Education Unit.)

Assessment in Higher Education (1993) J. Atkins *et al.*, Employment Department.

Assessment of competence in National Vocational Qualifications

Assessment of occupational competence has had a major impact on how assessment is carried out. The establishment of a framework of competence-based national vocational qualifications (NVQs) is changing the shape of the education and training system at all levels from basic education to professional development. This framework is based on the specification of occupational 'standards' and externally-defined performance criteria against which to assess evidence of achievement.

'Competence' in NVQ terms is intended to be demonstrated through a range of outcomes which embrace specific skills and the understanding, knowledge, attitudes and personal skills required to carry out an occupational role at a certain level of responsibility and autonomy. Definitions of competence and the performance criteria for assessment are derived from a process of 'functional analysis' which analyses work roles at different levels. This process is carried out by employers from a wide range of commercial and industrial sectors who form Industry Lead Bodies to set occupational standards for assessing competence.

Key aspects of competence were originally intended to be based on:

- technical or task skills: specific skills and knowledge which enable an individual to deliver the key purpose or outcome of the work role
- contingency management skills: skills needed to manage varied and sometimes unpredictable roles

- task management skills: 'overarching' skills which integrate the technical and task components into the overall work role
- role, job or environment skills: skills used to integrate the work role within the context of the wider organisational, market and social environment. (*Employment Department Guidance Notes,* 1989.)

Each element of competence is assessed using performance criteria and range statements which specify the different contexts and types of performance which must be assessed. These criteria are used by an assessor to judge the evidence that an individual can perform the activity to the required standards.

Assessment of competence is based on evidence of various kinds:

- direct observation of work activities
- testimony of skill/proficiency/competence
- projects and assignments
- evidence from prior achievements
- questioning techniques.

There are benefits to this approach which have had a strong impact on how assessment is presented to learners:

- requirements for competence in an occupational role are a clear basis for using assessment criteria
- action planning, assessment and accreditation of prior learning, the accumulation of individual 'credits' or 'units' towards a whole award are all easier because criteria are explicit to learners
- assessment is separated from teaching and learning processes so that learners can have competence accredited without having to follow a formal learning programme
- the specification of criteria and contexts for collecting evidence is designed to include employers and other work-place staff in assessing competence
- requirements for 'valid', 'reliable', 'authentic' and 'current' evidence make these features of evidence more explicit than they have tended to be in the past. This highlights the need for teachers and work-place assessors to be clear about these features. It also raises questions about whether relying on 'professional judgement' or implicit notions of what constitutes good performance is acceptable assessment practice.

An assessment strategy can therefore incorporate the valuable lessons of this approach into different programmes whilst recognising some of its limitations:

- emphasis on occupational competence may preclude other important social and personal outcomes from being recognised and assessed
- clear and detailed specification of all the features of occupational competence can result in extensive lists of performance criteria and details of range content which can be difficult and unwieldy to use, particularly in complex or unpredictable work roles
- occupational standards produced by different Lead Bodies vary considerably in their specifications of competence and associated criteria for assessment
- many in higher education and the professions believe that NVQs need adapting and extending for higher level 'competence' if they are to encompass adequately the knowledge base and qualities of personal effectiveness at higher levels of study and professional responsibility.

Useful reading

Understanding Competence (1989) Sue Otter, UDACE.

Assessment Issues and Problems in a Criterion-referenced System (1993) Alison Wolf, FEU.

NVQs at Higher Levels: A discussion paper (1993) Lindsay Mitchell, Competence and Assessment Occasional Series, Employment Department.

Work-based assessment

On-job or off-job training and work experience during a learning programme have long been a feature of partnerships between employers and schools, higher and further education institutions and Open College Networks. However, the introduction of NVQs has placed a more formal emphasis on the work-place as an 'assessment centre' where employees or trainees can be assessed and accredited for competence demonstrated through carrying out their work roles. In addition, there are a growing number of agreements between employers and individual agencies to design customised programmes and to assess and accredit these as part of higher education awards, Open College Network programmes or awarding body programmes outside NVQs.

There is also growing interest in how incidental and informal learning can be enhanced at work, why different work-places are more effective than others as 'learning organisations' for their employees and how line managers and supervisors can develop their assessment skills. The framework used here can enable an agency to review how different work-based learners might experience different types of assessment in a particular programme or organisation. This is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9 Work-based Learning

Different forms of work-based learning and assessment can be identified as:

- on-job training (formal instruction)
- off-job training (day and block release attendance at a college, for example)
- incidental or informal learning and assessment
- work experience placements and/or projects
- work-based assessment and accreditation of competence.

These may therefore contribute to formal assessment (and lead to accreditation for an award or qualification). They might also be part of a process to help an employee, trainee or student review and reflect on their progress.

An assessment strategy can help raise the quality of assessment by linking work-based learning and assessment with other approaches being offered to learners. This could have the following benefits:

- work-based learning and assessment are used to enhance the scope of learning outcomes and the evidence to demonstrate these
- work-places can be seen as 'learning organisations' so that knowledge and skills are gained and assessed in a variety of settings
- access to assessment and accreditation can be widened if the learning outcomes gained in the work-place are analysed and incorporated into a range of programmes
- use of assessment based on clearly defined competences can be used for recruitment/promotion.

There may be a number of barriers to the effectiveness of work-based learning and assessment, such as:

- the cost of training work-based assessors can be very high
- it can be difficult to provide adequate simulation or work experience for roles at professional levels or higher level NVQs
- the quality of placements varies considerably.

Further and higher education staff increasingly undertake work-place assessment and accreditation, often in conjunction with line managers and supervisors. An organisation or agency that wishes to include work-based learning in its overall assessment policy has to find ways of improving the quality of assessment, developing staff skills, and providing access to new skills and experiences for learners. Some strategies could include:

- analysing what learning outcomes can be achieved and assessed on different programmes using work experience
- examining how assessment at work and within a formal learning programme can be integrated and structured for full-time employees, part-time and full-time students
- developing criteria for quality assurance and minimum standards for accepting placements, such as trained assessors, a commitment to recording achievement, using competences or learning outcomes for assessment
- reviewing how access to work-based learning and assessment is organised for individual learners, within particular programmes or across an institution
- providing a database of employer links, including opportunities for placements, one-off assessment of skills or competence.

Useful reading

Learning from Work: Higher education developments (1992) Employment Department.

Work-based Learning (1992) FEU.

Work-based Learning Project Bulletins, Middlesex University.

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

APL has recently received a great deal of attention and development funding, primarily to widen access to NVQ accreditation. The model outlined in this report shows that assessment of prior learning is part of good practice in guidance and initial diagnostic assessment, and is used also as a basis for making decisions about entry to learning programmes. Some further education colleges have incorporated it into their guidance and selection/entry processes. This section discusses accreditation of prior learning which leads to actual certification of all or part of an award. Confusingly, the acronym APL sometimes refers to assessment, and sometimes to accreditation.

The 'Access to Assessment' initiative, funded by the Employment Department through the Training and Enterprise Councils and some further education colleges, offers a specialist service for the accreditation of prior learning, using competence-based assessment towards units or whole NVQs. This has highlighted a number of benefits:

- adults can gain formal recognition for learning outside formal education and training programmes and therefore avoid repeating learning processes
- access to accreditation can be widened for groups of learners previously under-represented in formal education and training
- flexible opportunities for accreditation reduce practical difficulties of finding the time and money to attend more traditional programmes
- curriculum change across an organisation can be introduced by providing flexible access to assessment and accreditation, and an APL service can become part of organisational policy to improve access and progression opportunities for adults
- staff skills in guidance, diagnostic assessment and action planning improve when colleges provide an APL service.

However, APL services have faced a number of barriers which make it important to locate APL in a wider strategy for raising the quality and accessibility of assessment:

- many APL services confine organisational change to a specific staffing and costing structure for NVQs. APL is perceived by staff not involved in the service to be a different and 'exclusive' form of assessment, and although 'validity', 'sufficiency' and 'authenticity' are a vital part of all good assessment, the terminology has tended to be associated with the assessment requirements for NVQs
- the NVQ qualification framework forms a specific part of further, adult and higher education provision, mostly at NVQ Levels 2 and 3; APL services are still largely restricted to accreditation of vocational competence. Many learners want flexible access to either lower or higher levels of accreditation or to accreditation of different types of learning
- APL can be time-consuming and difficult in programmes where there are no clear definitions of learning outcomes or where knowledge

and understanding are an important part of competence (for example, in knowledge-based or professional programmes)

- APL is seen as confusing by some because it appears to place the emphasis on assessing and accrediting achievement from the past. This has been seen as something distinct from the processes of identifying, assessing and certificating prior learning which all fit into a broader model of assessment but are often referred to as if they are interchangeable
- progress towards flexible and modular approaches to the design of learning programmes in further and higher education is very uneven. Many organisations therefore find it difficult to deliver 'top-up' programmes or to construct significantly varied programmes tailored to individual needs
- many managers see APL services as unrealistic and expensive because externally-provided development funding, the inflexibility of traditional resourcing which emphasises traditional teaching arrangements, and the LEA fee structure all militate against more flexible funding of staff time
- it can be difficult to sustain learners' motivation unless APL is a quick route to a qualification. APL has worked best when candidates have clear goals, a high level of motivation to collate evidence, and access to a range of evidence. Many adults, however, want the support of other learners as part of a learning programme.

The processes and methodology of APL can have a valuable impact on the assessment skills of staff. If the processes of recognition, assessment and accreditation of prior learning are part of a wider model of assessment, development projects and APL services can become one aspect of an overall assessment strategy.

Useful reading

APL and Learner Services (1992) FEU.

APL: A handbook for professionals (1992) Susan Simosko, Kogan Page.

Introducing APEL (1993) Maggie Challis, Routledge.

APL: Developing more flexible colleges (1993) Mike Field, Routledge.

Assessment of Prior Learning and Achievement: A study guide and resource pack to support staff development (1991) NIACE.

Cultural dimensions in assessment

This section highlights some areas which require further investigation, and attempts to show that assessors need to take account of implicit and explicit cultural differences.

Widening access to open and flexible assessment and accreditation for learners who have traditionally not participated in formal programmes has been an aim of some recent initiatives. Accreditation of Prior Learning and competence-based assessment in particular have been designed to make assessment and accreditation of adults' prior achievements easier. There is, therefore, growing interest in the effects of cultural dimensions on the processes of assessment and accreditation, especially in relation to black adults, women 'returners', adults with learning difficulties or physical disabilities, and to those with overseas experience and qualifications. For this latter group, there are specific difficulties in gaining access to formal

recognition of their achievements. However, difficulties for particular groups of learners arise from implicit and explicit forms of discrimination which become more noticeable when new forms of assessment, such as a portfolio of evidence and the one-to-one interview, are used.

Assessment will always be partial and subjective to some extent, both in the targets and outcomes that are identified as being important and in the interpretation of evidence. Assessors and black learners therefore need to be aware of how cultural dimensions can influence both the processes and outcomes of assessment, particularly where sources of evidence depend on overseas experience, or other experience traditionally not counted towards formal accreditation (such as home management, voluntary work and child-care) and where the assessor and candidate are from different backgrounds. Some of these dimensions are outlined below:

- it is difficult for black candidates from overseas and refugees to obtain clear information about their qualifications or routes into employment and education
- many terms used in assessment and accreditation of prior learning and competence-based assessment are difficult for many learners, and particularly for learners whose first language is not English
- questioning candidates about their ability to transfer experience and competence to other situations relies on the ability to reflect, explain and infer other courses of action in English
- the ease (and credibility) with which people can reflect, analyse and articulate their skills and knowledge is linked to linguistic, gender and cultural background
- assessors gain a 'feel' for how someone operates in a particular role and rely implicitly on proficiency at a high level of reflection, and the ability to do this in English. However, although articulating this evidence verbally, or in written formats, is a separate skill from a particular skill, assessors may implicitly infer competence from use of language
- oral questioning by assessors from different backgrounds may inadvertently lead to assumptions about skill and knowledge if a person's responses lack colloquial language and/or a technical vocabulary, or show difficulties in articulating experience and drawing inferences from it
- some competences in NVQs contain implicit pre-requisites for other skills such as communication at different levels of formality or hidden values about manner, personal style, the ability to relate to clients. These factors are particularly susceptible to favourable or unfavourable stereotypes by assessors from different cultural backgrounds.

A number of strategies, especially in initial guidance, diagnostic assessment, selection and recruitment can be adopted. However, further research and development work is needed in this area. Some strategies are described below:

- work placements can help overseas candidates acquire knowledge of British business practice and cultural dimensions in different occupational roles
- analysis of implicit skills and qualities required in different jobs can be made more explicit to candidates, and can supplement statements of NVQ competences
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses can be provided for specific vocational, professional and technical skills as

well as ESOL for assessment and are often more appropriate than traditional ESOL courses
- candidates can reflect and present evidence in their own language when evidence of ability in English is not required for a particular skill or role
- guidance and subject specialist staff can be offered staff development specifically to address issues of values and cultural dimensions in assessing prior learning for 'non-traditional' candidates (High Peak College).

Two recent projects are of interest to providers and practitioners interested in addressing issues of cultural difference in assessment:

- a recent NIACE survey carried out for the Employment Department showed that large numbers of black adults living in this country have overseas qualifications and experience in professional roles which are not assessed or recognised towards accreditation in Britain
- a project for refugees at Bournville College in Birmingham has shown that guidance and assessment of prior learning for adults whose experience and qualifications are gained overseas raises different cultural issues from assessment of white candidates.

Useful reading

Survey of Numbers of Black Adults with Professional Qualifications Gained Overseas (1993) Stella Dadzie, NIACE.

Working with Black Adult Learners: A practical guide (1993) Stella Dadzie, NIACE.

Records of Achievement

A National Record of Achievement (NRA) for all school leavers is administered by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). Two million learners currently possess a Record of Achievement (RoA) from their school or college and one million of these are in the NRA format.

An RoA is a mechanism for recording the outcomes of assessment and other achievements. The ways in which an RoA is used varies from programme to programme and between agencies. It can therefore be:

- a simple record of units or modules achieved as part of a whole award which can be updated as an individual progresses through her/his learning
- a more detailed account of achievements presented as a portfolio of evidence and recorded as a result of diagnostic assessment, review and action planning for a particular programme
- a record of progress and achievement in core skills which link different parts of a programme together
- a mechanism for recording achievements from a period of work-place learning
- a combination of these.

For many adult learners, the compilation of a portfolio of evidence of their previous experience and achievement is a retrospective Record of Achievement. Programmes which offer Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) for exemption or certification often require learners to compile a portfolio.

The purpose and format of an RoA may therefore vary between different programmes and agencies.

However, there are a number of factors which can limit the effectiveness of an RoA which agencies need to address if they wish to incorporate them into an overall assessment strategy:

- the variation in content, format and compilation of many RoAs and portfolios of evidence has meant that employers and admissions tutors do not use them consistently or give them comparable status
- information can be presented inappropriately for particular audiences
- there may be a lack of coherence between format and purposes for an RoA which means it is used differently between programmes within an agency or between the same programme offered by different organisations.

An assessment strategy can use Records of Achievement to:

- provide evidence for employers or admissions tutors of a broader range of achievements than is shown through examination results or the description of units or modules achieved in a qualification
- involve learners in defining and reviewing the outcomes of learning and assessment, including the achievement of unexpected or unplanned outcomes
- identify cross-curricula themes, 'core' and 'Enterprise in HE' skills
- encourage a variety of approaches to assessment by emphasising appropriate tasks and evidence from a wide variety of sources.

Useful reading

Managing Learning: The role of the recording of achievement (1993) Further Education Unit.

Section 8

Summary

This publicstion has attempted to show why organisations need an assessment strategy to raise the quality and flexibility of the assessment they provide for learners. It has also provided guidelines intended to assist organisations in designing a strategy for offering a range of services for their own particular context. This section summarises the main points.

Assessment may be used for initial guidance, diagnosis of needs and progression routes, on-going review, selection and accreditation. Teachers and learners themselves use assessment for different reasons (often without calling the process 'assessment') at different points – before, at entry, during and at the end of programmes. Assessment is therefore used for the same range of reasons, and can utilise the same processes, in all types of programmes and at all 'levels'. The framework described here can be used to review a very wide range of achievements gained inside and outside formal programmes.

Assessment involves the comparison of performance with a learner's own criteria and her previous performance, with other learners' performance or with externally-defined statements about what achievements should be demonstrated.

Learners, teachers, employers, guidance workers, admissions tutors are all involved in assessment but may not always be clear about its purpose at a particular point, or may be unsure about the basis for it. Understanding why assessment is being used, and which techniques are available, will help agencies ensure that they have the necessary infrastructure to provide learners with the assessment they need at appropriate points across all learning programmes. Without this, flexible accreditation and accumulation of 'credits' or modules is much more difficult.

The quality of assessment and the effect it can have on raising levels of achievement therefore partly depend on its 'fitness for purpose'. Assessment can be evaluated for this by ensuring that learners know how formative assessment in guidance and the learning process can increase their confidence, motivation and ability to recognise and describe their achievements. This then makes summative assessment more effective. If the purposes, outcomes and criteria being used are clear to learners and teachers, assessment is more likely to be fair and supportive.

Agencies have to consider how to get the most out of assessment, including the recognition and accreditation of valuable learning outcomes which are additional to those planned by the awarding body. However, they have to avoid duplication of effort and provide access to appropriate assessment with limited resources which may be linked to specific definitions of 'outcome' or 'achievement'.

An organisational strategy can provide a framework for reviewing existing assessment processes and the mechanisms used to ensure quality. Rather than responding in *ad hoc* and pragmatic ways to new initiatives, a strategy can help organisations to phase in change for particular programmes or

across the organisation and allow for the development of skills and the sharing of good practice.

However, in considering assessment, there is a danger that technical concerns dominate current educational debate. Indeed, this guide itself has an overwhelmingly 'technical' emphasis! Organisations may wish to take account of wider questions about the effects of assessment and accreditation on learning processes and outcomes.

Without a holistic view of where assessment fits into learning, new manifestations of 'teaching to the test' could appear. This tendency is made more likely with the increased use of externally prescribed assessment regimes. New forms of assessment may lead to a narrowing of teachers' and learners' vision of what learning and assessment are for, and what outcomes they should lead to. An assessment strategy and the development of teachers' skills can therefore address the overall purposes of assessment as well as their practical implementation.

Understanding Assessment

A Guide for Teachers and Managers in Post-Compulsory Education

Kathryn Ecclestone

Assessment and accreditation are being offered in new contexts and by a wide range of practitioners in post-16 educational settings. Learners, teachers, employers, guidance workers and admission tutors are all involved in assessment. *Understanding Assessment* presents a clear account of the purposes of assessment at the different stages of the learning process and the techniques available. The author explains how to design and implement an infrastructure within organisations that will support flexible accreditation and the accumulation of 'credits' with reference to examples of current good practice. Diagrams and checklists are included to demonstrate a strategic approach that will avoid duplication of effort and maximise limited resources.

Readership: Staff with management and development responsibilities for assessment and accreditation, guidance and careers advice and staff development and training in further and higher education, adult and community education and Open College Networks. It will also be of interest to staff in Training and Enterprise Councils, workplace trainers and teacher trainers.

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